
LESSON 12

MODERN THEORISTS (III): REVOLUTIONARY WAR

When it came to Vietnam, we found ourselves setting policy for a region that was terra incognito. We also totally underestimated the nationalist aspect of Ho Chi Minh's movement. We saw him first as a communist and only second as a Vietnamese nationalist.

--Robert S. McNamara,
In Retrospect (1995), pp. 32-33

Introduction

Purpose

In this lesson you will study

- Different 19th- and 20th-century concepts of and approaches to revolutionary war including
 - Guerrilla warfare
 - Unconventional warfare
 - Revolution
 - Ideas and movements of the most prominent theorists and practitioners of revolutionary warfare including
 - Karl Marx
 - Vladimir Lenin
 - Mao Tse-Tung
 - Frederick Engels
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Why Study Revolutionary War?

Since revolutionary war has occurred in many countries during the 19th and 20th centuries, you need to study these influential theorists and the application of their theories to gain a strong foundation on revolutionary war.

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Introduction, Continued

Relationship to Other Instruction	This lesson helps you understand the conflicts and problems discussed in previous lessons and subsequent courses such as <i>Operational Level of War</i> (8803), <i>MAGTF Operations</i> (8807), etc.
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Important Relationships	As part of your study of prominent theorists and their movements, you need to examine the relationships among the
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Ideological foundations of revolutionary warfare
Concepts of revolutionary warfare
Examples of revolutionary wars

Study Time	This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 2.5 hours of study.
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Educational Objectives

**Theory of
Revolutionary
War**

Understand the following:

- Theories of revolutionary war
 - Factors that shape revolutionary war [JPME Area 3b]
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**Revolution vice
Conventional
War**

Distinguish between the manner in which revolutionary war differs from conventional war. [JPME Areas 1a, 3b, and 3e]

**Revolutionary
and Guerrilla
Warfare**

Comprehend the relationship between revolutionary war theory and guerrilla warfare. [JPME Areas 3b and 3d]

**Conventional
Military and
Revolutionary
Warfare**

Understand the ways in which a conventional military force must adapt to a revolutionary war. [JPME Areas 3b and 3d]

**JPME Areas/
Objectives/Hours
(accounting data)**

1/a/0.5
3/b/0.5
3/d/0.5
3/e/0.5

Historical Background

Marx and Engels While "rebellion" in the form of violent popular protests, uprisings, and resistance to imperial intrusion is as old as oppression and imperialism, the **idea** of "revolutionary warfare," considered as a set of problems with strategic solutions, began to take shape about a century ago. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were the first great ideological strategists of what we call revolution. They gave the term a philosophical context, a historical explanation, a program of action, and an outline for the future.

Marx's theories of the masses' uprising to sweep away the bourgeoisie never came to fruition while he was alive, but did set the stage for the further development and exploitation of his ideas by a number of leaders, such as Vladimir Lenin and Mao Tse-Tung, who further developed and exploited these early concepts of revolution. These later ideas and interpretations included political and military ideas that conflicted with those of Marx and Engels.

- Lenin and Mao**
- Vladimir I. Lenin focused on the urban worker population.
 - Mao concentrated on the rural masses. Mao's revolutionary style of warfare has continued to inspire imitators throughout the world, even those whose programs are radically different from his; however, remember that while Mao's imitators have been creative in adapting his techniques to different environments, they have also made mistakes. The triumph of the practitioners of revolutionary warfare is not inevitable.
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Dilemma Posed by Revolutionary War Revolutionary war often is called internal war because the people of a country find themselves fighting each other. The dilemma placed on a uniformed military force is that the opposition often is not uniformed, not fighting by conventional means, and not playing by the same rules. It becomes difficult to distinguish between members of the population who are not part of the revolutionary movement and true revolutionary forces. This type of war normally finds military forces ill-equipped and ill-trained to deal with what can be either limited engagements or all-out warfare.

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Historical Background, Continued

Post-World War II Changes

The post-World War II era produced massive changes in the international scene. Part of this process was the rapid dissolution of the European empires. To those living at that time, however, these empires in 1945 and the immediate years thereafter still appeared strong and vibrant.

Influence of Decolonization

Within several decades, only small remnants of the empires remained and the specter of revolutionary war loomed.

In the era of decolonization, the specter of "wars of national liberation" (a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist phrase) appeared to be a dangerous threat to the West. Initially the western powers engaged in these kinds of irregular conflicts, but near the end of the Cold War and into the post-Cold War era, other powers also confronted this kind of war.

Examples

Examples of such involvement are the United States in Vietnam, the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and Vietnam in Cambodia after the north Vietnamese triumph in that country's protracted civil and ideological war. **Regardless of which examples are cited, be aware that "revolutionary warfare" is more than just banditry or guerrilla warfare.**

Changing Interpretations

It is easy, but erroneous, to see many past and contemporary conflicts in purely Marxist-Leninist-Maoist terms: While the techniques contemporary movements use may be similar to those of recent wars of national liberation, the motivations of those conducting these contemporary "revolutions" may be quite different.

Required Readings

***Theory and
Nature of War
Readings***

Millett, Richard. "Millett's Laws [of Intervention]," Unpublished Summary of notes of Eleventh Holder of Command and Staff College Foundation's Chair of Military Affairs, ed. by Dr. Donald Bittner, September 1993. *Theory and Nature of War Readings*, Annex F pp. F-3 to F-7. Millett's laws, much like a time honored chronicle of lessons learned from centuries of war and politics, give the reader wisdom for influencing expectations and the decisionmaking process. Residing on neither side of the political fence, Millett's laws draw their credibility from roots in history and seemingly unbiased reflections of social normalities.

***Makers of
Modern Strategy***

Shy, John, and Collier, Thomas W. "Revolutionary War." *Makers of Modern Strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Peter Paret. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 815 to 862. *Revolutionary War*, defined as the seizure of political power by the use of armed forces, emerges only since the 1940s as a complex facet of the all-encompassing branch of strategic military thought. From Machiavelli to Hitler and from Mao to the Shah of Iran, this trend is homogenous to all "revolutionary acts" and continues to be an aspect of industrialism and imperialism.

For Further Study

Supplemental Readings

The readings listed are **not** required. They are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

- Clausewitz. "The People in Arms." Book Six, Chapter 26, *On War*, pp. 479 to 483.
 - McNamara, Robert S. "We Were Wrong, Terribly Wrong." excerpt from *In Retrospect*, in *Newsweek*, April 17, 1995.
 - Porch, Douglas. "Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare." *Makers of Modern Strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Peter Paret. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 376 to 407.
 - Strachan, Hew. "Colonial Warfare, and Its Contribution to the Art of War in Europe." *European Armies and the Conduct of War*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1983, pp. 76 to 89. (Note: Reading total includes two full page maps.)
 - Wrigley, Russell F. "A Strategy of Partisan War: Nathaniel Greene," and "Annihilation of a People: The Indian Fighters." *The American Way of War*, pp. 18 to 39 and pp. 153 to 163, respectively.
 - Tzu, Sun. "Sun Tzu and Mao Tse-Tung." *The Art of War*, pp. 45 to 56.
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Issues for Consideration

Comparing Revolutionary Warfare and Coup d'etat

- What is revolutionary warfare?
 - How does it differ from a *coup d'etat*?
 - In what situations are these concepts synonymous?
 - Is there a basic revolutionary warfare characteristic that is not usually found in a *coup d'etat*?
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Conditions of Revolutionary Strategy

Revolutions are not usually made by states and their bureaucracies but by new organizations that develop from the dissatisfied elements in society. What conditions make a revolutionary strategy appropriate? Below are some of the elements inherent in a revolutionary movement. How do all of them relate to each other and come together to pose a threat to an existing state?

- Grievances
- Leadership
- Organization
- Action
- Plan
- Program

An important point in considering these elements is to think about how the existing government responds to them.

Revolutionary War Theory Vice Theories of Conventional War

Does modern revolutionary war theory conflict with the theories of war you have studied thus far? Or, does it simply require a change in frame of reference? Is revolutionary war "limited" or "unlimited"?

- Remember the "where, how, and why" (purposes) of the establishment and of the revolutionaries.
- Try to determine the basic premise of any revolutionary ideology. This will require some analysis and synthesis of the differing ideological approaches you cover in this lesson.

Again, the readings by Shy and Collier should help you in your study of this issue.

Issues for Consideration, Continued

**Revolutionary
and Guerrilla
Warfare**

How does revolutionary war relate to guerrilla warfare? Can modern revolutionary war exist without guerrilla war, or vice versa?

**Conventional
Military Force
Vice
Revolutionary
War**

How does a conventional military force adapt to a modern revolutionary war?
How should it prepare for such a war?

**European
Colonialism**

What was the experience of the European colonial powers in "colonial" wars?

Did the situation change over time? Specifically, were post-World War II "wars of national liberation" different from 19th century and early 20th century colonial revolts and insurrections?